

We will keep raising community issues and concerns: Mushawarat President

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An Interview with AIMMM President Zafarul Islam Khan by Abhay Kumar

New Delhi: Dr. Zafarul Islam Khan is a brilliant and unique amalgam of journalist, author, social activist and one of the most influential voices among Muslim community. Besides, he is also the President of the All India Muslim Majlis-e-Mushawarat (AIMMM). When the AIMMM was celebrating its fiftieth anniversary, **Abhay Kumar** posed Zafarul Islam Khan a set of questions about the AIMMM, particularly its history, functioning, controversies and challenges. The following is the excerpt of the interview.



Dr Zafarul Islam Khan

TCN: As a President, how would you evaluate the fifty-year old journey of the AIMMM? What have been its achievements and failures?

Dr. Zafarul Islam Khan: AIMMM has been able to raise community's issues, give it confidence to progress and demand its rights. In general, it has offered a common platform for all Muslims, individuals and organisations, to air their views and arrive at a common minimum position on umpteen issues facing the largest Muslim community in the world after Indonesia and to make these known to the government, media and our own people.

TCN: The new Constitution of the AIMMM was adopted in 2002 in which attempts were made to make it a more "open-ended" organisation. With this, could you give us some of the most important landmarks of the long journey of the AIMMM?

ZIK: In fact, the current constitution of the AIMMM places much power in the hands of the President which may be good in a large organisation with good infrastructure but where work is done voluntarily; this hampers work as members sit aloof thinking that the President will do

everything. This has to change. First of all, the organisation should have a reasonable secretariat and infrastructure and more democracy in its functioning.

TCN: During the Golden Jubilee Celebration of the AIMMM, eminent personalities from non-Muslim communities were first time given life-time awards. Is the AIMMM today keener on reaching out to non-Muslims, particularly the secular and democratic sections among them?

ZIK: It was not proper on our part to give life time awards to only AIMMM or Muslim community people. We decided that now and in future also others who struggle for human and minority rights and stand by Muslims in their hour of pain and trial must also be recognised and awarded.

TCN: The AIMMM suffered a split in 2000 into two factions, one headed by Syed Shahabuddin and another by Maulana Salim Qasmi. Could you tell me more about the causes of the split?

ZIK: There was a difference of opinion about the way the elections were held in 2000 and how the results were announced. Being technically right, Syed Shahabuddin refused to budge and this caused the split. In community and larger issues, being technically or even legally right is not enough to stick to a position. You have to take the larger good and larger picture into your consideration for the sake of unity and common good.



Mushawart golden jubilee celebration on August 31, 2015 at IIC, New Delhi (Courtesy: AIMMM)

TCN: How did the reunion happen in 2013?

ZIK: The reunion happened in October 2013 when the Salim faction intimated to the Shahabuddin faction, then headed by me, that they would like to merge 'unconditionally'; thereafter there was no hurdle and things moved fast. Earlier, talks were held on many occasions and each faction had stuck to its positions and conditions.

TCN: The AIMMM has rightly listed in charter the issues, facing the Muslim community, such as security, education, reservation, protection of religious and cultural freedoms and proportional representation. But the most difficult task is to get them addressed. In other words, what is the AIMMM going to do to get its demands accepted?

ZIK: We are an advocacy group. We do not have legal or constitutional powers. We will keep raising community issues and concerns with the various players in the Indian democratic field and will encourage our community to stick to its just demands. Our past struggle shows that we can achieve some if not all our demands and aspirations. We recognise that a lot has to be done by the community itself.

TCN: While the AIMMM is not a political organisation, involved in contesting elections, it has claimed to have supported the most secular candidate, irrespective of religions and castes. Given the political, social and economic marginalisation, should Muslims warm up to the ideas of supporting Asaduddin Owaisi's AIMIM and other Muslim-dominated parties?

ZIK: It has been a considered position of the AIMMM to support the most secular and clean candidates in elections, preferably Muslims from Muslim-majority constituencies. We seldom discuss personalities or parties by their name.

TCN: The AIMMM claims to be the "platform" for all Muslim organisations and "eminent" personalities. Yet, the Golden jubilee celebration of the Mushawarat did not appear to be reflective of such a diversity. How far will you agree with the views?

ZIK: The AIMMM was and remains the only common platform of Indian Muslims. It is true that some organisations are not part of it, especially the Jamiat Ulama-e Hind. Everyone is free to join or to leave the organisation. Many have come back and the latest news is that the Momin Conference has just decided to rejoin AIMMM. As far as eminent personalities are concerned, we have many of them as our members and the door is open for people under some criteria to join at the national or state levels.

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